

# PHONING IT IN

by Moe Shapiro



## AESTHETICS

a poem is in the bop, not what it's formed with  
a life is in the be-now, and every moment it holds in  
a universe is in the both of neither one that's in it  
a mystery is in the bite, no less than in the kiss

On Bonny Doon Road half a mile from Highway 1  
where it snakes through coastal canyon  
and I always go a little too fast  
On the morning after fall's first rain  
hitting a curve and starting to spin  
I do what you don't want to do  
I step too hard on the brake and we start to skid  
Spun once, twice, three or was it four times?  
Banging, bouncing  
Off the road into rock and dirt  
Airbags exploding like cap gun howitzers  
Wife screaming, baby crying  
and all I could think of was that time at San Clemente  
when I was seven or eight  
and a big wave caught me  
bodysurfing a little too far out in front  
Whirling me furiously, churning up sand, sky and water in my head

We came to rest  
in shock  
in the middle of the road  
My glasses gone  
The smoke of the airbags burning my nostrils  
The edge of panic  
until we got the baby out of her seat, cuddled her, and she laughed  
out loud

we understand each other because  
we are each other.  
it was not mad passion that made it so  
it was not the fire that burns in every human heart  
it was not the hope for something better (or at least extinction)  
it was not my occasional hour of showing off  
it was none of these  
it was the green green timber of a forest I have yet to see  
it was the occupation of caresses  
it was this dream

## LET ME SPEND TIME BEHIND ROSES

I loved you, going through palaces my fingertips built unknowing  
My one murmur thirsted through forests of shining salute  
You are a landscape, yet stand beside me

That you are young outdarkens secrets  
Countless ways you've sung  
You are a live body

Kings were once dazzled at your sun-mouth  
I feel a strange tender scent  
You are a nest which must give off perfumes

Out of your triple window crawls an octopus  
Unfathomable spiders scrape you clean  
Closer hearts sing in your house of floral beat  
A light of eel-hunters tints your northern tower  
You are the violet ink of dying orchards

Our now lies bare  
Little children fight for lonely masks  
The roses are trying to chime  
My blossoms are eyes to hear the garden

## PROJECT UNIVERSE

first, a physical reality

jars of elements

clutter a table in front of Carl Sagan

he explains what they all are

and says that the only difference between him and them

is how he and they are organized

but he's not quite right

"how" is a part of it,

but "what" is a more important part

is what organizes Carl Sagan different than what organizes me?

our chemicals are virtually the same, but our psyches? do we have psyches?

perhaps Carl doesn't, but he must have chemicals organized as a brain

secondly, this brain operates by instinct

instinct underlies waking consciousness

and dreaming is purely instinctual

thirdly, semantic thought and the logic of grammar

define consciousness

fourthly, desire and distaste may give rise to losing and winning

fifth, is the heart of the matter

the vision

from its brilliant fullness of noon

from its subtle canvas of twilight

from its indigo blot of midnight

to the most glorious epiphanies of its blazing dawn:

it's who you are not how you are

six: you must have a direction

you shall choose and act

seven: be pleased to pay all debts (you may only cheat in your own universe)

eight: teardrops still permitted

nine: laughter only

there is a tenth one also

I am one who is beauty in search of beauty  
I am one who seeks to know what is beyond the gate  
I am one who exceeds excess, and plants new gardens beyond  
imagination,  
who senses the ruins yet to come in columned palaces of today  
I am inheritor of my own testament, discoverer of what I already know,  
and interpreter of my waking dreams  
Tempest tossed on dry but verdant land  
Entering the chapel of nature, the garden of delight, both earthly and  
heavenly,  
the paradise of grapes and raisins, growing out of pots of sun  
I am one who grows the flower of mystery



PIECED TOGETHER OUT OF OLD DISCONTINUOUS MOMENTS  
LIKE NOW

Buddha said find  
out for yourself

so people came and  
asked him how to do it

history repeats itself (but not as  
often as you hear that repeated)

the smell of a rose does  
not replace its roots

## A POEM FOR OFFICER ROBLES (B.P.D. BADGE #26)

you called me a weirdo  
while in your world newborn babes are left in dumpsters  
and the forests are clear-cut for fastfood packaging  
you called me a weirdo  
while in your world police plant evidence to entrap  
those presumed guilty by some official prejudice  
you called me a weirdo  
while in your world the masters make profits on nuclear overkill  
and people with AIDS are blamed for living at all  
you called me a weirdo  
hell yes i'm a weirdo!  
in your world i wouldn't have it any other way

## HOW NOT TO GET SHOT

(Oakland, California 1976)

The busted sash lets Gary's bathroom window fall on Jackson's finger  
which bleeds so much they send me to the drugstore for gauze

My walk back's on Telegraph between MacArthur and the 580  
a short skinny young black man stumbles up to me  
"hey, bro, ya gotta help me out"  
this big beat-up old car is parked at the curb  
its front passenger door is open to a tall skinny young white man  
long blonde hair, in the driver's seat  
smiling, and extending a hand with a pin-rolled joint in it  
"I'm too stoned, can ya check it out?", croaks Bro

I'm maneuvered into mid front seat by Bro  
he hops in beside me, slams the door, and exclaims in a new voice  
"let's git outta here so's we can fire up!"  
immediately I know I'm in trouble  
Bro elbows me in the ribs and reveals what looks like the butt of a  
pistol  
popping out of his waistband  
he raves unconvincingly about getting out of Napa, after killing his  
father  
all the time grinning this strangely charming smirk  
then he goes through my pockets as I sit there, numbly unresisting

All I have is five bucks and some change  
and most of a pack of Kools  
by now we've been around the block, so they drop me beneath the  
580 overpass  
Bro pulls a bunch of cigarettes out of my pack and hands them to me,  
gets back in the car  
as they pull away he tosses me a quarter "for the bus"

Pitied even by muggers, I walk back to Gary's  
it's starting to rain, a few big drops kiss my face  
I still have the gauze in a little brown paper bag  
but it turns out Jackson's finger is no longer bleeding

(Cairo, Egypt 1983)

Misr will fly me to Nairobi, but not without a visa  
all week long, dialing the Kenyan consulate  
it just rings and rings  
my flight leaves tomorrow morning and it finally occurs to me  
'this is Cairo!' the phone book might be wrong  
down to the front desk of Hotel Ramsis  
get the number known only to desk clerks and dial it at three-ten  
it answers on one ring  
"sure you can get a visa, just bring your passport to the consulate"

It's Friday in a Muslim country  
they close at three-thirty  
I rush out to the street in a panic  
it's Friday in a Muslim country  
not a cab in sight  
an observant Copt with a car spots me  
"need a ride?"

I give him the address and he knows exactly where it is  
first, over the 26th of July bridge to Gezirah  
then he pulls over, "where are you going?"  
"to find out where it is"  
three-thirty looms, he gets back in, we're off  
he pulls up near the consulate right as the bell rings in my head  
I'm out  
I'm running full tilt for the door

a young man in uniform holding a submachine gun is standing out  
front  
he sees me running toward him, tenses, and points his gun my way  
right then, adrenalined, I swerve toward the consulate door  
and the soldier deflates, exhaling  
not being attacked by an American tourist

(Berkeley, California 1989)

"Get down, get down, get down!"  
cop funk chorus as both doors burst open  
SWAT  
I'm at the kitchen table, then under it  
calm prisoner of gravity  
surrounded by automatic rifles  
I've never been so relaxed

(San Francisco, California 1992)

Midnight Mission, need supplies  
Cala Foods on South Van Ness  
go up Shotwell to the parking lot  
young African man, clad all in blue  
a shining cap of turquoise satin  
and a handgun in my face

I feel intensely pulsating fear and anger  
I'm amazed to find it's not coming from me  
it's coming from him  
I empty my cash pocket into his hand  
he looks at it, notices the twenty, nods  
'ok, I've made my hit'  
waving me off with his pistol, he tries some misdirection  
but sure enough, looking back, I see him going the other way

back toward the projects

I march home, grab a twenty, and head back to Cala  
gotta get right back on

(Oakland, California 2000)

Tzedek says  
"risk your life for a small thing"

walking up Broadway, broad daylight  
heading home with a bag of Wendy's  
crossing Taft, the perp sidles up to me  
young male cauc, dark and slight  
he presses something hard and square into my side  
it could have been anything, I didn't ask to see  
"Don't have any money", I lied, and offered him fast food  
he wasn't hungry, just walked off disappointed  
I walked off home

the clouds of rose  
that shout  
what a human soul must  
whisper

## THE MYSTERIES OF MASTER THERION

Filled with the sight he went searching.  
Believing in excitement and pious Antichrist,  
he sought confirmation.  
He walked each path, but on stones.  
He dared to dream the Lord's City.  
He entered in astonishment where bakers pronounce the Suffering  
One.

Northward was full of thundering.  
He came south to the Great Island of the dark burning.  
There Life's God laid a silver sea.  
There, on a Hill, he dug the miracle Body.

He is the One, and also the Paul,  
who was another Joseph, another baptized by holy Ananias.  
The ruby and Him are all, they have that stream of precious books,  
that fine gentle grace.  
We are red, surpassing wonders of books and gemstones.  
Above these wretched rubies of malady, all is clear.

The mysteries descend to the Host,  
"Twelve has significance to Twelve."

The Faith world shall have faith in stones.  
Its subject is fallen in excessive approach,  
and compelled to bewilderment.

A Miner went into the City of Death,  
beyond the Goddess of Dreadful Things,  
and there He told Man's story  
Where celebrants protect the sacred wall,  
He sang.



## THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER

He can't be challenged.  
You can try, but it cuts no ice.  
You'll never see him lose his cool.  
He has all the answers  
Because he never answers anything.  
He doesn't ask questions either  
Because you might answer  
And some answers aren't okay  
Because they don't involve gratification

And after he's slept with your wife  
And decided that she should leave you,  
Change her name, and join his harem  
He grins at you, with an unperformed wink  
And says, waving his hand toward a crowd of invisible disciples

"They expect it of me!"

HOW TO LIVE AS A SINGLE NATURAL BEING  
(For Charles Olson)

breathe in and out  
but live in the space between breaths  
let your thoughts be breaths  
and find the space between

eat breakfast with friends  
and love your enemies  
because they offer you  
the opportunity to triumph over them

thereafter  
benign indifference is the best revenge

take a long walk every day  
even if only in your mind

study yourself constantly  
but believe yourself never

forget whatever you can

## A POEM FOR A FRIEND

On a beach at lowest tide  
I found a broken shell  
The meat inside had long since gone away  
Is it empty now, I wondered,  
or does it contain everything?  
Likewise, when my own shell breaks  
will my soul escape  
or will the universe come rushing in?  
The water may know  
but all I hear is the breaking of the waves

## MY FAITH

There is no place in the desert  
to hide from the sun.

There is no way to shelter  
in the shade of your own shadow.

If all that is is form, if empty  
representations are all that exist  
then I can never know my own  
non-existence, nor is anything  
communicated by the word of  
"void".

A poem begins in silence,  
in silence it ends,  
how very like my universe.

## ITALIAN POEM

the street  
ingenuous as dying  
reclines in garden light  
a body of acacias is rustling  
a thrush waits around to observe the end

thousands of acid kids in windows  
rows of Adriatic toughs in muddy threadbare  
corners of the breeze, dust undershirts  
ardent Sabines barred from some impoverished mountains

long lime Calvary faces pass by, thick and low  
slowly closer to the sacred monuments  
the indescribable wet heap of the vice houses  
as thousands sit in the kisses of a gesture

a fog of sweat is on the world  
the sun's hand sharpens fast  
a little inferno

## THE MYTH OF DISHYPHUS

stainless steel pot encrusted with dried-on rice  
cast-iron skillet with a layer of solidified bacon grease covering  
patches of unidentifiable fried-on food  
an oven rack coated with baked-on bread crumbs

I set to work with a vengeance, scrubbing, scraping, rinsing, repeating  
well aware that any sense of accomplishment will eventually vanish  
with the knowledge that this will all be done again tomorrow

night falls heavy in the olive grove  
wolves go walking hand in hand  
through wild thickets

oaks grow over prelates  
and flowers over the already dead  
birds and black coolness  
where night is

your lips are wild  
your wall of songs  
a golden boat of resting gentle

I DON'T KNOW, BUT I KNOW

When we die  
it's either into blackness  
or into a light that's purple and gold and music all at once

Which will you see?  
It's not how good you've been  
that determines the nature of your eternal afterlife

It's not the hours  
of prayer or meditation  
or the fickle affections of some all-powerful deity

It's grace or chance  
or quantum fluctuations  
of infinite probabilities becoming manifest destiny

So relax  
We all will surely die  
That's the lie that levels, frees, and pacifies



## A POEM FOR HUGH

It always works,  
even when I crack  
my toes against the concrete.  
Suddenly the lights go on,  
it's clear; toes do not  
belong where the thinness  
of skin and the proximity  
of concrete make for bruise or  
blood dripping on the sidewalk.  
And now I walk on the grass.  
It always works.

## EXTRACTED POEM

1

The rhythm of being is one continuous beat  
    The surface is as deep  
        as you can get  
    I guess that's the point  
of mirrors

2

Wind clapping in a neighbor's pillowcases  
diet root beer will not save America  
a buzz-saw whined in the distance  
a fly buzzed around the room  
    avoiding my hand until he tired  
    of playing and made a beeline  
    for the door  
I listened to some silence  
blinding bright blackness  
a febrile night  
haunted by stars & space  
can nonexistence exist?  
    A drop of rain dies every time the sun comes out  
    and a tear could do the same

3

There is something about clear night skies  
that whispers to me  
in countless unseen stars  
like unheard songs  
behind the cold black desert wind  
an ache to shoot rainbows at pigeons  
and drown in mist  
putting pain where we used to be well as ceremonies,  
and figuring it for witches

4

Dusk,  
and the mournful chant of unseen muezzins tingles in the heavy air  
where is a well for me to drink from,  
as clouds & fragments prepare my death?  
there's grandeur in vein & leaf  
the mice aloud  
such small rustling  
the way of all empires is death  
and symmetry is imbalance righting itself by tilting the world

5

A man went boating  
in the placid waters  
of a tiny mountain tarn.  
So strange that he should drown in the flood tide  
of his own dry dream.

6

The search for realization is empty  
Let the final suffering be  
The givens are all one

7

To bathe in a fragrant swell of polyphonic melody  
is nothing to the song the universal being sings  
to respect confusion  
we must allow awareness  
to roar in it  
a lion's fearless proclamation roar:  
"I am going by where I am going  
in my enchanted robe  
the serpent way and me  
who put the name of Mother to it"

8

Great beauty  
can only develop  
in perilous deeds  
while blame  
is nineteenth century  
and confession  
should have leisure  
as do butterflies

9

That indifference does nothing is no surprise  
but that love does nothing but balance out the indifference is not  
expected

## THE EYES OF WHEN

I walked the only way I could when hot dreams went on alone

Not giving in to reality

Only jutting fibers remembering light

Not ancient

Dreaming loneliness instead, and houses where loneliness is given out

It's the empty reality

Yet, my heart rages in love, and no one who's watched me cry has been there

## EIGHT SHORT POEMS FROM EARTH TO SKY

an eagle nears the sun  
but all we see is its shadow

Christ's miraculous corpse, now ordinary, decays  
a pus-drenched beehive between his ribs

darkness illuminates all  
seven holes in your head

where you see a coffin  
dead men see nothing

eat an apple before the worms do

on Bali  
shadows are used to enlighten

these locks turn keys into comprehension

inside the golden suit of armor was a wonderful red bird which  
opening its eyes  
invented day

## INVITATION TO SADHANA

Have at that silent hill,  
that 'not' which cradles the numberless words.  
Meditation, populous as slumbers and fluttering with form,  
give me a mirror and show me how to watch.

I want to be like water  
born of rain that

falls from heaven but welling up from springs hidden deep  
in the bowels of the earth

I want to flow  
like a seasonal  
creek, into successive rivers until, yielding  
always to the pull  
of gravity, I reach the great all-knowing  
sea

and in that epic journey I will passively conform to every bend &  
contour around & over which I pour, never offering resistance, even as  
the

hardest of stone wears down  
with my passing

and then when it gets too hot

I'll simply evaporate



## HEAVEN IS LAMENTABLE

In that hour of darkness  
I supplicate the emperor of night  
On dragon day  
I head to the palace of not thunder, but fire  
At the palace I dream the trees have granted my request  
But I will not be their wonderful wonder

The ancients of everywhere need no burial  
Theirs is called under grass, and shouting, and no air

## A POEM FOR PETER'S 60TH

60 is so much younger now  
than when our folks turned 60  
Is that because we never grew up  
or that they did?  
I suspect they may have felt just as surprised as we are  
Wasn't it just yesterday that I picked a scab off these six year old  
hands?  
Surely this wrinkled flesh all spotted with age belongs to Grandma  
Yes, it surely does.  
For I am Grandma  
You are Grandma  
The same child that lives in us  
still lived in her, even at 93

We are not deluded when we live our youth behind this death mask  
When we saw the old man hollering at Robby Thompson over a play  
at second base  
When we thought he was acting like a little kid  
That was when we were deluded  
Because he WAS a little kid

Now Robby, past 50 himself  
still covers second in his soul  
as if he was back in Little League  
Your inner baby still cries over burnt toast  
I dream my way through embodied existence  
We're dead already, and yet to be born  
Now is the only moment to exist, and it doesn't  
Six or 60 means nothing to the void

A still, small voice

spoke up  
from the back of the burning bus.

"Driver,

why am I talking to myself?",

it said.

"Because there ain't nobody  
but me, buddy.",

the driver mused,

as if anyone else

could hear.

I got off at Church and Market.

Forgetfulness, sleep, and death.

## FOR MARY OLIVER

I don't notice much. A bobcat in the  
tall grass along the path through  
the great meadow. An eagle one  
day, another day a hawk, circling  
high above. Out in great distance  
the mountains beyond the bay  
and the sea from which it  
eventuates. Moths, in season,  
flitting amid the milkweed that  
edges the trail. Grass snakes,  
long and short, slithering past.  
Squirrels, deer, going about  
their business, but watchful,  
ready at any moment to bolt,  
knowing that any animal on  
two legs, wearing clothes,  
can never be fully trusted.

## HER KISSES

You haven't been kissed  
Until you've been kissed by everything  
It'll take your breath away  
Hell, it'll take your entire being away  
and knock you to the floor while you don't exist

Which is where you'll awaken once more to life  
With the goofiest grin on your face  
and a heart as open to every possibility  
as it's possible to be

And if you say anything at all  
It'll just be "Wow!"

## DREAM

We sit in the meadow  
almost touching  
Your eyes request my lips  
"I've never felt this close to anyone," you whisper  
I can't move  
I want to kiss your shoulder  
with my hand  
I can't speak  
I want to say, "I love you"  
I just gaze into your eyes  
Our faces are so close together

## EXTRA INNINGS

Like a dead pull hitter  
suddenly going the opposite way  
she freezes me in left  
and everything I've learned  
about her tendencies and angles off the bat  
is useless

Her ball slices to fall just fair  
a foot from my glove  
I chase it down in the corner  
just in time to turn and see her  
take third standing up

I love you, honey, and that's no error  
but couldn't you just whiff every once in a while?